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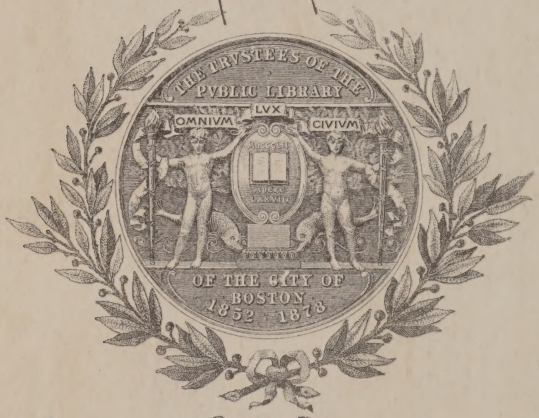


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Rev. H. Burroughs.

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# Convention Sermon.

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# Convention Sermon.

A

# SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE ANNUAL CONVENTION

OF THE

## PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH,

IN THE

## EASTERN DIOCESE,

IN

7547.112

## GRACE CHURCH, NEW BEDFORD, MASS.,

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1837.

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BY WILLIAM H. LEWIS,

Rector of St. Michael's Church, Marblehead.

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1837.

*New Bedford, Sept.* 27, 1837.

Rev. and Dear Sir,

The undersigned, clergymen of the Eastern Diocese, adopt the present method of expressing to you the satisfaction with which they listened to the practical and impressive views of ministerial character embodied in your Convention Sermon, and as we are precluded by a standing rule of the Convention from acting officially on the subject, we, individually, request you to furnish a copy of your discourse for the press. Very affectionately,

Your brethren in Christ,

John West, John Bristed, Alexander H. Vinton, Erastus D'Wolf, S. G. Appleton, Wm. Horton, T. Edson, Jona. M. Wainwright, Alfred L. Baury, S. B. Babcock, Thos. M. Clark, Washington Van Zandt, E. Monroe, Thomas Peck, George Taft, James Pratt, J. P. Fenner, John S. Stone, Jos. H. Clinch, E. Livermore, G. W. Hathaway, M. A. D'Wolf Howe, George Waters, A. H. Cull, Dan'l Leach, Ira Warren, Thomas H. Vail, Samuel Fuller, Jr.

*New Bedford, September* 28, 1837.

Dear Brethren,

The kind spirit with which my Sermon before the Convention was received, has been very gratifying to my own personal feelings ; and may also be regarded as evidence "of an earnest desire after holiness" among the hearers, since even such plain and simple suggestions met with so warm a response. To be instrumental in awakening one holier purpose in any heart, is an honor which an angel might covet, and should this discourse, which at your request is placed at your disposal, in any degree subserve this end, it will be a matter of thankfulness with me. With my prayers for a more sanctified influence, and increased reward for each one of us, I remain

Your friend and brother in Christ,

WILLIAM H. LEWIS.

Rev. John West, John Bristed, Alex'r H. Vinton, &c.

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Rev. H. Burroughs

# SERMON.

St. John, 17 : 19.

"AND FOR THEIR SAKES I SANCTIFY MYSELF."

Success, alone can satisfy the devoted minister of Christ. To be found *faithful* might content him, but if unsuccessful, he can hardly feel assured that he has been faithful. Nothing short of evident fruits would have sufficed the ardent Paul, nothing less will meet the desires of those who breathe his spirit.

But what minister is there, that knows not the anxieties of unsuccessful labor? We look over a world unreclaimed to God, and sigh to think, that when we would reach every human being with the sweet charities of the gospel, we can only soften here and there a hard heart under our own immediate influence, with the love of Jesus. We grieve, that the best of our years for usefulness are gliding away, and the grave must soon close over us, while so little has been accomplished. Oh, tell me how I may win souls for Christ, is our anxious cry. Tell me how my ministry may be rendered more successful?

All who share such anxieties, will look favorably upon the present attempt to answer these inquiries.

The thought which I wish to impress in this discourse is, *that high attainments in holiness are most essential to ministerial success.*

"For their sakes," says our Saviour, "I sanctify myself." This implies not merely, as many suppose, that he was set apart as an offering for the sins of the world; for he adds, "that they," my disciples, "may be sanctified through the truth;" so that *his* sanctification and *theirs* seem to be of the same nature, because spoken of without any distinction. Our divine Master sanctified himself, by resisting the temptations of Satan; by active obedience to God's law; and perhaps, also, by a progressive work of sanctification; for though perfect in childhood, he might become more so in *degree* in manhood; as he grew in wisdom, though there was no folly in his infancy. But whether progressive, or not, it was by active effort, that he conformed himself to God's law; and one end of all was, that he might benefit those whom he came to save. Behold, brethren, the spotless Saviour, sanctifying himself, that he might the more abundantly bless a lost world! How much more is this necessary for the sinful creatures to whom the same ministry is now entrusted! Duty, example, and motive, are all presented in our text.

1. That high attainments in holiness are necessary to our success, may be inferred from the fact, *that God demands them from his ministers.*

God knows best what will accomplish the design of his own institutions; and, above every thing else,

he requires his ministers to sanctify themselves. Holiness to the Lord was written in conspicuous letters upon the high priest's mitre; holy vestments, frequent washing and sacrifices, declared that he would be sanctified among Jewish Priests and Levites. Holiness was the distinction and power of our great High Priest; for his miracles and teaching would have been as ineffectual as theirs who sat in Moses' seat, and by their children cast out devils, unless attended with superior purity. "Take heed to *thyself*, and to thy doctrine," was the apostolic caution; "for in doing *this*, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee," And among all the recorded instances of divine judgments upon prophets and priests, we read of none but such as were inflicted for sin. A want of attainments in divine or human knowledge, or of the gifts of utterance, was never visited with God's displeasure in the least degree; while Korah, Eli's sons, Judas, Caiaphas, Demas, and hundreds more, are examples of his wrath against ungodliness in his ministers. Laws of holiness enjoined upon the priesthood, were given at the beginning of the Jewish dispensation, while schools of the prophets were of more recent date, and provisions for purity are much more abundant, than for instruction, throughout the whole Bible. We are not to infer from hence, however, that knowledge and gifts are to be despised; for,

2. In the second place, holiness leads to that knowledge necessary to success in the ministry.

One of the chief defects in preaching is the want of clear, discriminating, and expanded views of divine truth; so that the preacher might often reverse St. Paul's assertion, and say to an intelligent Christian audience, Whom ye truly worship, Him I ignorantly declare unto you. God will not bless a Christ crucified by a sermon, but that Christ crucified, revealed in his word. And our attainments in the knowledge of this great truth, will be in proportion to our personal holiness. An ungodly minister cannot comprehend it. The Spirit will not reveal it to him. A holy heart cannot fail of knowing it. One eminent in piety cannot be kept in a state of spiritual ignorance. If he knew not a letter of his mother tongue, when the grace of God first visited his heart, he would spell out the perfections of God in the heavens, he would catch and treasure up divine truth unheeded by other ears in the sanctuary; he would read it in the mysterious characters of the Spirit within his own soul, and, amid all privations, so digest and connect the great system of redemption, that learned divines might sit at his feet, and be taught by him. And even the union of great piety with high acquisitions in *human* science is not so rare as is supposed. Learning and philosophy, in the eminently sanctified, are like small tapers in the sunlight; they are there as truly, and may shine as brightly, without attracting as much notice, as among the unsanctified, where there is no superior light. Many an one distinguished for piety, has also an extent of reading and reflection, which it

would be the ambition of a worldly mind to display, but which with him passes unnoticed to the grave, and is buried under the epitaph of a good man. Sin closed the door of knowledge in paradise, and ever since has kept it barred, and will, until universal holiness shall again unlock it, and open a thousand fields of science now unknown. The scriptural theory of education, making clean first the heart, will one day be understood; and it is a matter of regret, especially in theology, that it is now so little known. If we need, in our seminaries, professors to teach students how to barb the arrows of conviction, that want must be met by appointing one to lead them to greater attainments in holiness; and most happily, in our general seminary, this want has in a measure been supplied, by giving to one a pastoral care over the souls of those whose minds only before had been thought worthy of culture. Could we measure eminence in piety, the canon requiring literary attainments in candidates for the ministry might be repealed; for it is the ignorance, which is connected with pride and presumption, that is to be dreaded in the Church; and a holy man, whatever attainments he might lack, would bring no more reproach, and be no more to be dreaded, than the lowest angel among higher intelligences in heaven. A holy heart will not neglect any knowledge which can bear upon the recovery of a lost world, will reject all useless studies, will possess the most powerful incentives to diligence, and consecrate all acquirements most effectively to

the furtherance of the Gospel. The Church has nothing to dread from ignorance in the ministry, if it be a holy ministry.

3. Again ; high attainments in holiness will secure those outward gifts and graces necessary to success in the ministry.

Trace any defect in the manner and style of a minister, any thing objectionable in his public or private walk, and it will almost invariably be found that a larger share of grace would have corrected it. The fear of man, displays of self, affected eloquence, tedious prosing, tricks to catch applause, heartless coldness,—all would vanish ; and the minister, clothed with holiness, would be invested with a dignity and grace which nothing else could impart. That unction in preaching, so much admired, so difficult of attainment, is grace in the heart, suffusing the countenance, and flowing forth in every look, and word, and gesture. Under the Law, great pains were taken with regard to the personal appearance of priests, but the Gospel oftener selects the rude in speech, and the despised, like Paul, in bodily presence, giving them holiness in a higher degree, as their compensative power. And let his natural disadvantages be ever so great, let him be like Baxter, a bleeding skeleton, or like Paul, contemptible in appearance,—let him be taken from low employments in life, and brought to minister to the refined and learned, the devoted servant of Jesus will acquire enough of outward gifts to command attention, and to gain success ; and gifts are

desirable only so far as they secure this end. Better than the sword and pebbles of the ancient orator, is the teaching of the Spirit; and all graces acquired in any other way are but tinsel, which will soon wear off, and disclose the base metal beneath.

4. Again; holiness in the ministry gives that *confidence*, which is necessary to success.

It is manifestly allied with divine truth, and a standing miraculous attestation of a mission from above. It is the broad seal of Heaven to our credentials, most difficult to be counterfeited. Even heathen priests have felt it so necessary to their reception, that they have aimed at the show of superior sanctity, though not with such success as when they have pretended to miraculous powers. One who can for years live blamelessly among his people, must gain their confidence. Even the wicked will esteem him as a man of God, and "do many things gladly, knowing him to be a righteous man." Jesus, it is true, was despised of men, but not among the great majority of his countrymen; and even those, whose outrageous passions were too much opposed by him, to endure him, trembled as they laid their hands upon him. In this country, where Christianity has placed the restraint of its decencies upon all, if a pastor meets with open contempt, or hears a disparaging remark upon his profession, he may generally be sure, that his own misconduct has lowered him, and given license to the tongue of the wicked. If there be any sin indulged by him, he may be sure that they will find it

out. Other men may have their secret besetments, which they can manage to conceal from the world ; but he will be read through and through by those penetrating eyes, which are so constantly fastened upon him, and his most mortifying weaknesses will be dragged to light, and made more public than the grossest offences of the worldling. And one sin divulged, will destroy confidence in his labors. He may preach, and pray, and exhort admirably ; but the wonder will be that he does not practise more. If we would neutralise all our efforts, brethren, let us cherish one sin, even down in the recesses of our souls, and the work of ruin will be accomplished.

Nor can a minister have the necessary confidence in *himself*, if destitute of holiness. God says to the wicked, "what hast thou to do to take my law in thy mouth ?" and conscience says the same. It has been made a question, "whether a preacher should ever go beyond his own experience in preaching ?—he will not be likely to do it, whether he should or not. He will present truth only so far as he endeavors to practise, and rather discourage any thing further than he himself aims at ; so that if we set our standard low, we shall hang as leaden weights on souls panting after perfection, and keep them down to our own wretched level of sinfulness. And sin indulged, will destroy our confidence in addressing them in private. Much is said of the difficulty of parlor preaching. We should find the gift wonderfully improved, by more of closet preaching to our own hearts. Jesus Christ found no

difficulty in introducing religion any where, and we know that when we live near to God, obstacles in the way of this part of our duty are more easily surmounted, and we can speak with freedom. The same man who will deal very plainly with his people from the pulpit, is often afraid to say the same in private, lest the application should be turned upon himself. Our prayer should be, "Open thou our lips, O Lord," by taking away our guilt, "and our mouth shall show forth thy praise."

5. High attainments in holiness qualify the minister to be an experimental guide.

To make these attainments, we must know the depths of Satan, and the power of grace,—the lurkings of pride and selfishness, and the deceitfulness of sin,—the evil of unbelief, and the gloom of despondency,—the comforts of prayer, and the preciousness of Christ. He, who has learned to pluck sin from his own heart, has gained in experience, what it was the glory of Infinite Wisdom to foreknow, and that which man could never teach. And when, in possession of this secret, he is placed in the pulpit, and begins to draw from his own heart, he will reach feelings, which the hearers themselves scarce knew that they shared,—he will force them to exclaim, "he told me all things that ever I did,"—and the "truth will commend itself to their consciences as in the sight of God." The inquirer will find in that man a safe guide,—the doubting a skilful casuist,—the desponding a comforter,—and the saint of the Lord, a conductor to lead him one step higher,

and yet one step higher up that mount of holiness on whose top God dwelleth. A minister, eminent in piety, will rarely find a case among all the varied circumstances of his people, where his own rich experience will not furnish some guidance. And it will often be a matter of wonder with him, how all the dealings of God, in his whole private history, have been bearing upon his own personal sanctification, and thus qualifying him for usefulness. The regret is, that the experience comes so late, and that the skill which it gives us in handling the sword of the Spirit, is gained just as death relaxes our hold upon it. Let us remember that none but the experienced minister can be successful, and that none but the holy can become experienced.

6. Again; holiness renders the minister a prevalent intercessor with God.

The last thing brought in judgment against those, who have the care of souls, may be, their neglect to mention their people in their prayers: while the first and heaviest charge may be against the *spirit* of their petitions, and of the offerer. How shall we make those countless acts of intercession for our flocks, which we every day offer, more prevalent? how move that Spirit's influences, which alone can new create the sinner's soul? Prayer prevails with God just in proportion as we are sanctified. The priest must offer a cleansing sacrifice for himself first, and then for the sins of the people. "God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God, and *doeth his will*, him God hear-

eth." It is "the effectual fervent prayer of the *righteous* man that availeth much;" and Jesus himself to be our intercessor, must be holy, harmless, and separate from sinners. With what hope could a criminal plead for a fellow criminal, or a disobedient child implore favors? while a son distinguished for filial piety, might ask a father and he would feel as if he could refuse him nothing. "When ye make many prayers," God said to the Israelites, "I will not hear you, your hands are filled with blood." "If we *abide in Christ* we may ask what we will, and it shall be done for us of our Father in heaven."

7. Moreover; facts prove that the minister's success is proportionate to his holiness.

We have sometimes seen the servant of God, endowed with every advantage of natural and acquired talent, entering at the very commencement of his career, upon unbounded popularity, called to the highest stations,—followed by admiring crowds,—and made the theme of universal discourse. But the *fruits* of his labors, where are they? We look for them in vain. Like the aeronaut he goes forth amid applause, but in a little time the crowd find that they have had but a *profitless* exhibition, and he himself shortly descends, amidst mortifying circumstances, to be the scoff of those who had just shouted his praise. He wanted that holiness which is necessary to sustained effort, and to draw down the divine blessing, and thus secure a lasting popularity, based upon usefulness; for after all the ease with which mankind are at first led away by

appearance, they will in the end be content only with substantial profit. The minister, whom God *blesses* is brought forward in a different way. He may commence his labors in obscurity—scarcely known among his brethren, who dream not what an instrument for his glory God is preparing among them. But he is growing in holiness. Neglect and contempt subdue his pride. By withholding worldly honors, God teaches him to disregard them, and to feel that the honor which cometh from above is enough. He is daily learning to live upon God and to God alone. As he can bear more of earthly distinction, without elation, it is suffered to come upon him. As the instrument is perfected, a large field of usefulness gradually opens; and at the close of his career, he may have a name known and honored wherever goodness is prized,—and yet remain all uninjured by this popularity,—and blessed with a degree of usefulness which all admire, and for which he gives the glory to God. Thus that ministry of Paul, the first years of which were passed as a neglected, suspected, and persecuted preacher in Arabia, Cilicia and Damascus, led him on, as he was sanctified for the Master's use, through every renowned city of ancient times, until converts every where, from the sandy desert up to Cæsar's household, blessed his name. Every one, from his own recollections, can furnish similar instances; for many now most honored in the Church have been by a long series of humbling providences, and large measures of divine grace, matured in holiness, ere they reached that distinction.

It is vain to look for eminence in usefulness, where there is not maturity in holiness. God *may* use the preaching of a wicked minister for the conversion of souls, but it is only as a chance arrow may hit the mark: that he *will* use that of a holy man, may be a matter of calculation and certainty, like the aim of the trained marksman. Experience has established the general rule, that our success may be measured by our holiness, and our holiness by our success. Such a rule may bear hard upon us, and we may be ready to raise as our shield, those oft repeated sayings of unfaithful ministers, concerning "the seed long buried, and at last springing up," and "the treasure being in earthen vessels," and of the Gospel preached by men of like passions and infirmities; but the rule is none the less true, because it bears hard upon us. There have been exceptions to this rule; and there are some in the Bible; as the cases of Enoch and Noah. There have been instances enough like that of the malefactor's late repentance, to keep us from despair, if ours be an unsuccessful ministry; but not enough to encourage indolence and presumption. Ten thousand witnesses testify, that "whom God sanctifies for his work, him he also glorifies with success."

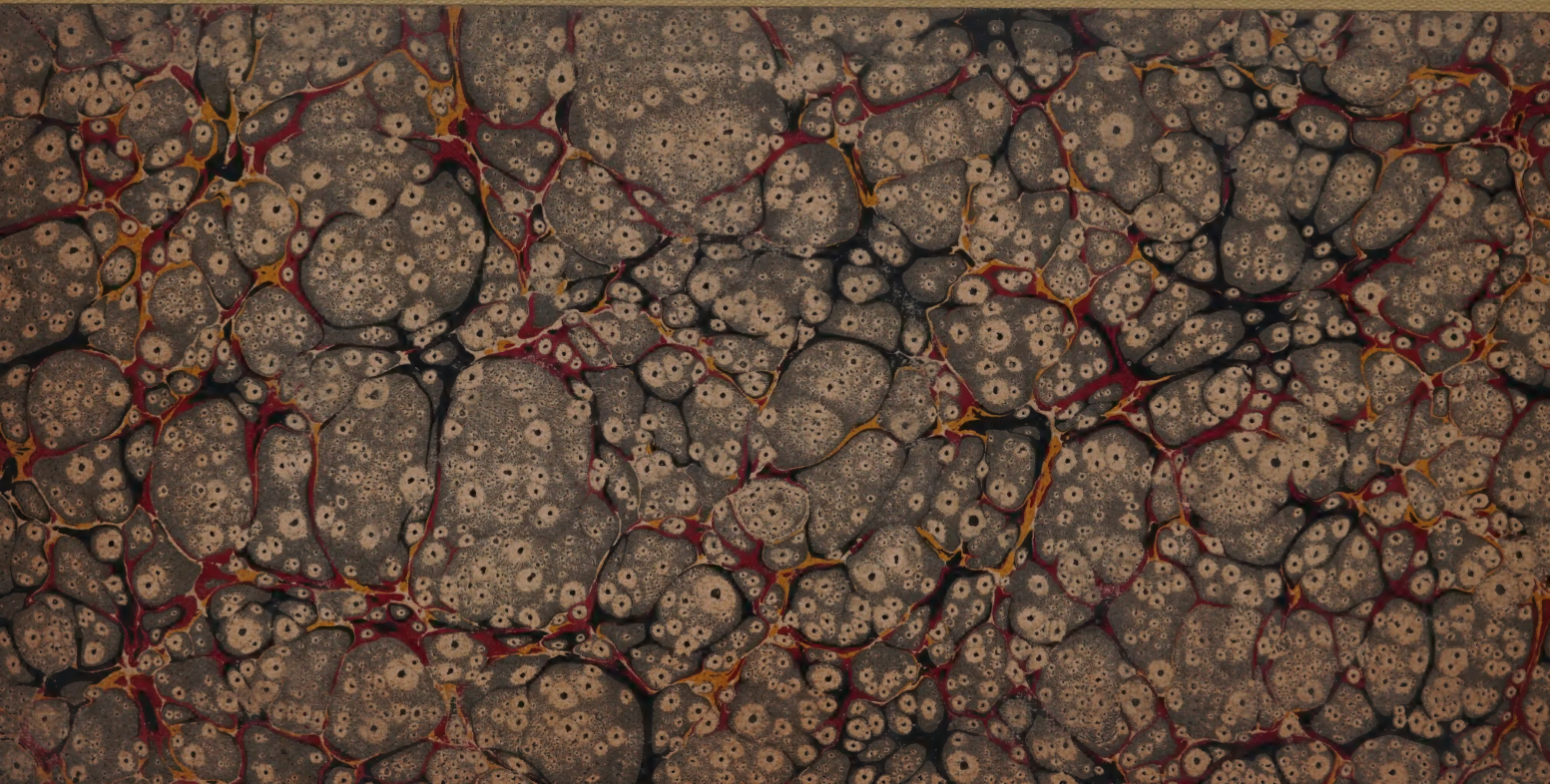
We have seen that holiness in the ministry is necessary to success, because God demands it;—because it leads to those attainments in knowledge, and outward gifts which contribute to usefulness,—because it inspires that confidence, without which none can succeed,—because it makes us experimental guides,

and prevalent intercessors ; and because facts prove that the holy are successful. With these considerations before us, my brethren in the ministry, and with an eye of pity glancing over our fallen world, and a heart of love carrying us back to the beloved flock over which we are placed, can we refrain from saying with all our souls, "for *their* sakes, I *will* sanctify myself." If the salvation of men is so connected with my sanctification, here let sin die within my heart, at this altar let me for once say with unqualified assent, "and here O Lord I present unto thee, myself, my soul and body, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto thee?" We of all others have peculiar and higher advantages for attaining holiness. We may think of special hindrances which none others share, but it would be denying the efficacy of the means of grace, in the midst of which we live ;—it would be asserting that the temptations of the world from which we are withdrawn, are not to be dreaded—it would be accusing God of gathering where he has not strawed, when he demands superior sanctity in us,—it would be condemning the universal decision of mankind, and manifesting unthankfulness for our privileges, not to acknowledge that, of all in this sinful world, we can best escape its pollutions. Let superior holiness then be our distinction. That minister is to be pitied who is characterized by any other, whether it be as a man of great intellect,—as a fine scholar,—or as an eloquent orator. If these are the distinctive appellations always associated with the name

of a minister ; they are his shame, instead of his glory, for he has gained them at the expense of his piety. To be first mentioned as a holy man should be his ambition. This is a distinction which may be worn without envy. While the jealousy of little minds is always hovering around greatness of any other kind, striving to pluck a feather, the man whose characteristic excellence is holiness, may stand as an angel drawing admiration and attention, while detraction is silent ; and envy herself is ready to fall down and do homage. When attainments in mere earthly things come in contrast with our own, it is self conflicting with self, and drawing away worship from one idol to another : but when holiness is manifested, it is God in the soul, and every idol falls before his reflected image. And the power of holiness for usefulness, is one which *all* may wield. We may see deficiencies in ministerial qualifications which we can never hope to remedy, but all arms are of a length in reaching after holiness, and the more we are conscious of such deficiencies, the more should we seek after that which will most easily cover them. Thank God, it is not by those things which his providence places out of the reach of so many, that the world is to be converted to himself, for then multitudes might despair. But if it be by sanctifying ourselves, a door of hope and usefulness is open to the humblest of us. Let it animate with a holy ambition after perfectness. Let our unceasing prayer be ; " O my God purify and use me, in thine earthly service,—purify and use, purify and use, until

I am made a vessel of gold in thine house, sanctified and meet for the Master's use;—yea until as the last sin drops from me forever, (O blest hour, when the last shall release its hold!) I rise to thine eternal and perfect service in heaven."

And we ask the prayers of our fellow Christians, that we may be sanctified. Their own interest seconds the appeal, for the ministers of Christ are the property of the Church, and all that advances their worth is the people's gain. Much of remaining imperfection will be witnessed, in the best of them, but their faults should no more be a matter of malignant triumph and detraction, than the wounds of a leader in the battle, should rejoice the hearts of his soldiers. It is a mark of true piety if we grieve over the failings of ministers, and pray much for their sanctification.

But this subject has an application to every private Christian as well as to ministers, for they have the power of holiness to exert, and it will give them success in the same ways. We want more of the co-operation of pious laymen in our Church. And if they will come to our aid with that sanctified influence, which shall be divested of arrogance and spiritual pride, we shall hail the day, when the talents of our pious members of the Church, shall be consecrated to the Church in more prominent efforts for the service of our Redeemer. They are bound to make such consecration. No prejudice against this—no frowns of ministers can release them from their obligation.—They will be ashamed to enter heaven, if they have

not endeavored to discharge it. One would think the angels might meet them and exclaim : " live on earth, and do nothing for Christ !—live twenty, forty, or sixty years and not convert a soul,—live with the knowledge of Jesus, and not spread it,—live amid dying sinners and not strive to save them!"—and that then, they might withdraw with wondering looks, and converse apart upon the strangeness of the fact, more mysterious to them than the divine decrees which the poet represents fallen spirits of as discussing. We may enter heaven, as the poor of this world,—as the despised, neglected, and persecuted, and be none the less welcome ; but if we could enter thither, having done little for Christ, I know not where we should find society among those benevolent spirits above. Let us not, dear brethren, leave this world of sin with such a character. Let us sanctify ourselves, and carry hence, when we separate, an extended hallowed influence for Christ. May we be found faithful in our respective spheres of duty, until called to that world where " he that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified shall be one," for our great Redeemer's sake. AMEN.